

Stakeholders Meeting

Established Commission's Mandate

INTRODUCTION

On March 12 and 13, 2002, the *Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform* held its first dialogue with a diverse group of stakeholders invited by the Commission. The Commission had two objectives:

- to seek guidance from individuals who had been identified as having a passion about the justice system and who could facilitate and critique the work of the Commission, and
- to generate ideas on where the Commission might focus its work for the next two years.

The stakeholders identified critical areas for reform of the justice system. They identified opportunities and challenges for the Commission. Most importantly, they shared their collective wisdom and knowledge, which guided the Commission in the development of the Dialogue Strategy on which the Commission has embarked.

In general, participants shared a sincere desire to explore and understand other perspectives with respect to justice reform in Saskatchewan. Although all stakeholders came from organizations and communities with specific needs and objectives, there was a definite interest in understanding the perspectives of other stakeholders. A desire to "establish a network for future dialogues," "share what works and best practices," and to "close the communication gap with respect to the justice system," were frequent expressions. The Commission was advised to balance what is not working with respect to the justice system with what is working or could be further improved. The Commission was encouraged to work towards building positive relationships.

AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR REFORM

The Community Connection

- Expand the role of the community in addressing justice matters
- Build safer communities for children
- Heal families
- Provide community support for those in contact with the justice system

Stakeholders Meeting (continued)

Victims and Violence

- Promote zero tolerance for violence in communities
- Be sensitive of the need to validate a person's trauma
- Empower women and men to deal more effectively with violence
- Improve access to support programs

Education and Understanding

- Improve communications and understanding of the justice system

Changing the Culture of Organizations

- Change the culture of organizations in the justice system - unhealthy organizations tend to undermine constructive, healthy behaviour and preclude innovation and cooperation

Reforms and the Wider Context

- Consider the wider social, economic and political context in which recommendations will be implemented
- Take an integrated approach with social issues, community needs and the justice system

Youth Issues

- Stop criminalizing our youth
- Invest in keeping youth out of the system (recreation, address substance abuse and other issues specific to teenagers)

Incarceration

- Utilize as a remedy of last resort, not the first response of the justice system
- Make rehabilitative and productive rather than a convenient warehousing alternative

Root Causes of Crime

- Address the root causes of crime
- View the problems holistically, not sector by sector
- Examine the foundations and history of the existing justice system to reveal hidden assumptions about crime, rehabilitation, justice, healing and safe communities

What's Working and What's Not

- Identify those practices and programs that seem to be working and find ways to improve on that progress
- Build on what is working

Racism

- Address the significant impact racism has on the justice system's relationship with Aboriginal people

Stakeholders Meeting (continued)

Process

The stakeholders made a number of suggestions concerning the processes the Commission should use as it developed its recommendations:

- Provide a safe, yet open forum for people to talk about their experiences
- Keep the general public informed
- Use technology to promote the work of the Commission
- Do not become pre-occupied with formal "consultations" or "hearings", but consider dialogues with communities

Balance in the Dialogues

- Listen to agents of the justice system, victims, offenders, their families and their communities, those who are marginalized by society, those who run the system, service providers, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities

Balance the Past and Present

- Show compassion and patience when past problems emerge
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people want change, sooner rather than later, but somehow the past will have to be reckoned with and acknowledged

Making the Case for Change

- Recommendations may be implemented in a difficult environment
- Make a strong case for reform
- Maintain programs that are working, change those that are not
- Address the need for short-term and long-term change

A Communications Strategy

- Communicate the Commission's purpose and progress to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities
- Be transparent and open
- Be accountable

Capitalize on Community Strengths

- Get people and organizations to share power and be responsible for the change
- Every community and organization was recognized as possessing strengths and weaknesses
- Communities are the key to positive reform

The Commission as a Bridge

- The Commission is a bridge between First Nations, Métis and non-Aboriginal communities and the justice system
- Dialogue between the participants, the communities and the system is vital to building a foundation for constructive and lasting change

Barriers

- Public cynicism
- Conflict between the Commission's proposed agenda for change and government priorities

